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BY THE SAME AUTHOR

ODD NUMBERS

A FOOL'S PARADISE

THE CRACKLING OF THORNS

RHYMES OF THE EAST

CONSTABLE & CO. LTD.

ODD CREATURES



And when I gained a closer view
Your features, as I gazed thereon,
Betrayed a marked resemblance to
My more than Brother, Robinson.

ODD CREATURES :

A Selection

BY

DUM-DUM

LONDON

CONSTABLE & COMPANY LTD

10 ORANGE STREET LEICESTER SQUARE WC

First published . . . 1915

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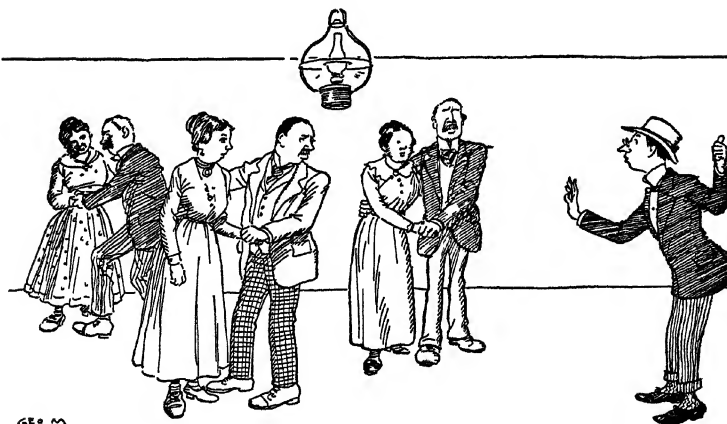
NOTE.—This selection contains most of my verses on animals, embellished by Mr. Morrow's Illustrations. The 'Whole Hog' is, of course, allegorical, and I suppose a bicycle, alive or dead, cannot strictly be called an animal; but I have treated it as one. For permission to reprint the 'Cockatoo,' 'The Hen,' 'Fauvette,' and the 'Porpoise,' I am indebted to Messrs. Bradbury and Agnew.

ODD CREATURES

WEARY POULTRY

[The young people of a certain small commune have been accustomed to meet for the purpose of dancing and merry-making. It has been officially declared that 'the noise they make frightens the cocks and hens of the village,' and dancing has been prohibited 'during the hours in which the domestic animals take their repose.']

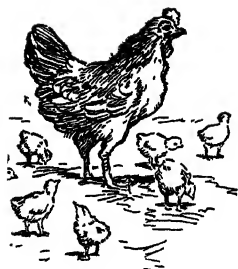
LADS and lassies, you that nightly
Gather to the nimble flute,
There to trip it, not too lightly,
On the broad, fantastic boot,
Couples who with clumsy frolic
Well-nigh shake the groaning floor,
While the noise of your bucolic
Laughter stays the local snore;



WEARY POULTRY

Hushed is now that simple pleasure ;
Nevermore when hours are dark
Shall you tread the artless measure
Or indulge the rural lark ;
Not to man it greatly mattered,
But the weary cocks and hens
Find their constitutions shattered
By your large-sized 8's and 10's.

Chanticleer the early morning
Once proclaimed with clarion bray,
Giving all the village warning
Of the coming work-a-day ;
Then the hours he kept were early ;
Now awake till prime of dawn
He feels far too slack and surly
To do anything but yawn.



Dorcas, too, the mother's model,
Once upraised a piercing screech
When she saw her small ones toddle
For one moment out of reach ;

WEARY POULTRY

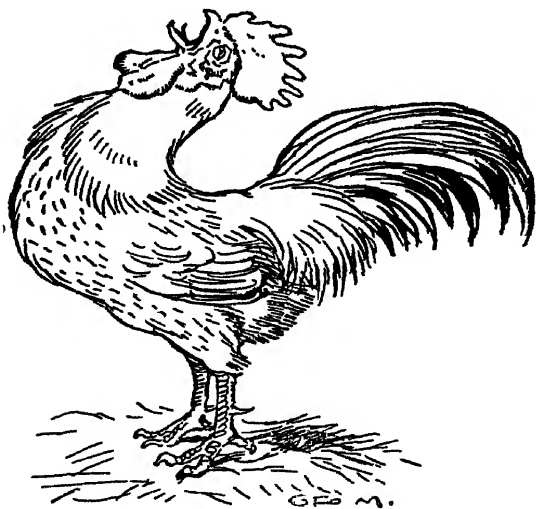
Now she lets them roam neglected,
Careless, though the worst may hap,
While she gives an unaffected
Stretch and takes a midday nap.

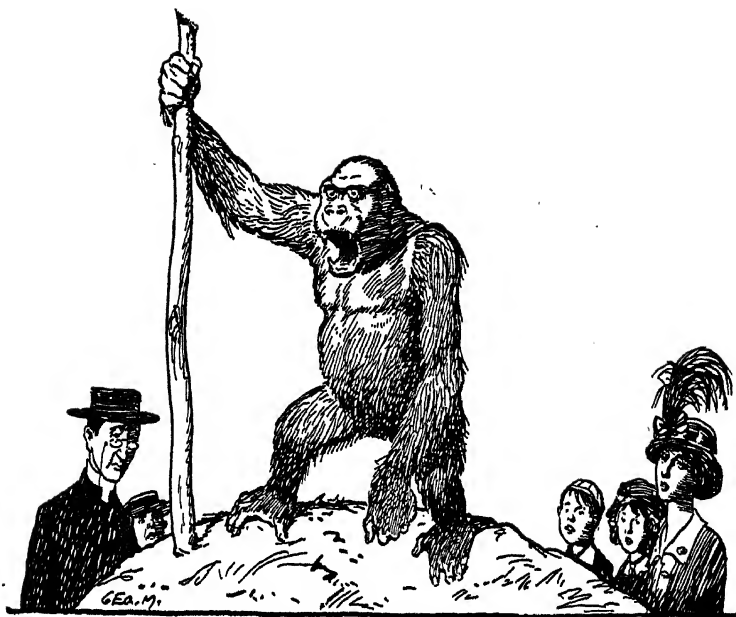
Now, again, the ready layers
Wander dull and heavy-eyed,
And, from being one-a-dayers,
Calmly let the whole thing slide ;
While the sitter grows so jumpy
That she leaps, all wings and legs,
At a whisper, from her lumpy
Seat of chilled and ruined eggs.

So do all forsake their uses.
Pullets, thin as any ghost,
Find their dried and sapless juices
Quite unfit them for the roast ;
And, in short, where all was cheerful,
Loud with honest cluck and crow,
Dark Insomnia stalks with fearful
Gait and lays the poultry low.

WEARY POULTRY

Wherefore, be your rustic dances
All suspended through the night;
In the given circumstances,
Best, perhaps, suspend them quite.
If temptations come, resist 'em;
Knowing this, ye soulless boors,
Poultry have a nervous system
Far more delicate than yours.





ODE

TO A STUFFED GORILLA OF ENORMOUS PROPORTIONS

THOU monstrous Effigy! O stuff and stark!

O Thou whom Nature callously designed
In man's rough favour for a brutal lark—

Which might be funny, but was far from kind—

Lord, when I see that shape

I gasp, I stand agape,

Wond'ring if Thou be man, or I a brawnless ape.

ODE TO A STUFFED GORILLA

I may not sing the beauties of thy face
Because there are none ; gnarled Thou art, and bent ;
Massive, I grant Thee, yet for perfect grace
Something o'er-cumbrous, something too distent
Of corporation, hey ?
A bland and gracious trait
In man—with Thee it seems to act the other way.

But tho' we hold Thee plain (that love the Greek)
Thou hast a something ; in thy native parts
I doubt not thy magnificent physique
Was well esteemed ; and many Simian hearts
Have thrilled, with soft alarms,
To view thy homely charms,
And pined to lie in fold of those colossal arms.

Nay, and Thou too hast loved. If men say truth,
Thou hadst a swart and favourable bride ;
Misguided One ! She took Thee for a youth
Of fondest beauty ; and, upon thy side,
Thou wouldst proclaim her fair
Beyond all others there ;
And, by the gods, you must have been a bonny pair !

ODE TO A STUFFED GORILLA

Haply that frozen snarl whereat men quail
Has ofttimes thawed when on thy teeming pile,
Wifely, she dallied with the nimble nail—
Nay, even worn a rudimentary smile
In such fond hours to see
Thy child, in artless glee,
Scragging some hapless prey, or shinning up a tree.



ODE TO A STUFFED GORILLA

Alas ! To-day thy leathery widow weeps,
Thine heir bemoans an amiable sire :
We only, conscious of some inkling creeps,
E'en as we gaze, are awed while we admire :—
 Stuft as Thou art, I fear
 Lest I approach too near ;
Alive, I certainly, for one, had not been here.

Which brings me to thy murderer ? What of him ?
What spurred the idiot to that fatal shot ?
He was not thinking, or the light was dim,
Or something ; for in goodly sooth I wot,
 Had he foreknown his deed,
 He would have paid less heed
To a sure aim than to a first-class turn of speed.

Nay, but I see it all. Methinks he moved
In pensive error through a tropic glade
With thickest foliage loftily enrooved ;
When, gazing upwards on the vaulty shade,
 Lo, through a tiny chink,
 A patch of fur did wink,
As tho' some small, small beast had gone aloft to think.

ODE TO A STUFFED GORILLA



He had not fired—so tiny 'twas to view,
He had not fired—but to his eager ken
'Twas strange—unknown; he dreamed of something new
In squirrels or the like; one specimen
Were worth a life's renown!

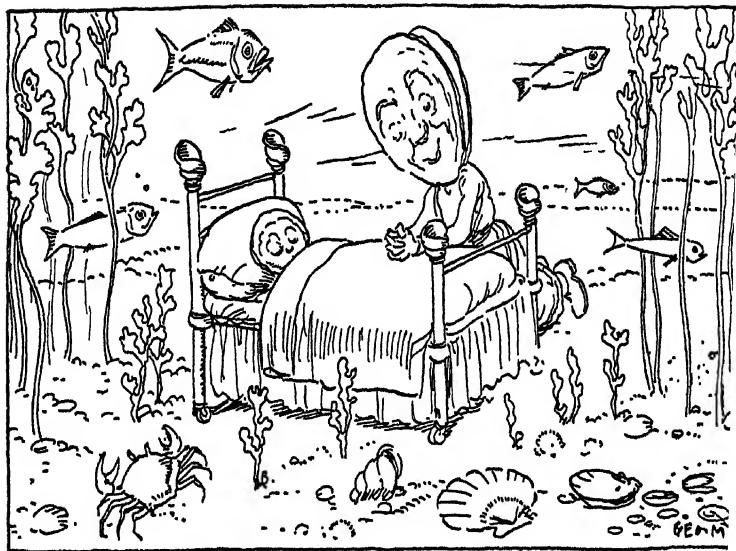
.

Agog to bring it down,
He raised his tube, and coolly banded 'into the brown.'

ODE TO A STUFFED GORILLA

Then through those groves a verberate protest rolled
Throbbing; the high roof swayed as in a storm;
He heard great timbers rending; and, behold!
Huge, bloated, spider-like, a horrible form
Burst the thick leaves asunder;
And, with a cry of wonder,
The sportsman took a breath and skipped away from under.

All legs and wings, hands grabbing and teeth gnashing,
Cursing and clawing and clutching in desperate dash,
He saw it hanging—heard the last branch smashing—
Turned him about. With one almighty crash
Forty-eight solid stone
Of furious brawn and bone
Flashed like a meteor through the air and lay—*alone!*



THE OYSTER'S LULLABY

THE MOTHER-OYSTER SINGS

SLEEP, little oyster, sleep,
Here in a peaceful bed;
Now is the excellent birth of May
When enemies pass for a while away,
And oysters revel in holiday
With never a care o'erhead;
Down in a foe-less deep,
Sleep, little oyster, sleep.

THE OYSTER'S LULLABY

Swell, little oyster, swell.

Swell till your strength has grown ;
Swell till your daddy and I are cheered
By an adult son with a lusty beard
And a promising family, maybe, reared

By a wife (sweet wife) of your own.
Lapped in a silver shell,
Swell, little oyster, swell.

Haste, little oyster, haste.

Quickly the close time goes ;
Comes the month with its rolling 'r'
When men sink ravening down from far
To serve you moaning across the 'bar'

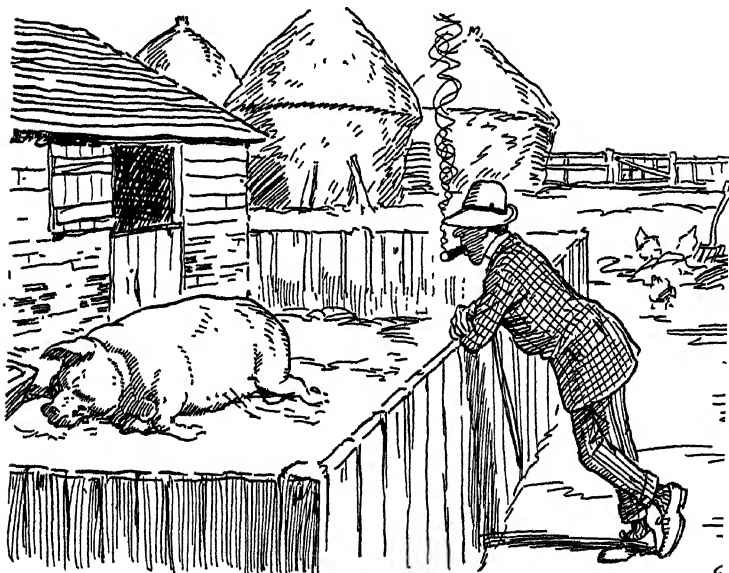
Or, possibly, cooked. Who knows ?
Dear to the gourmet's taste,
Haste, little oyster, haste.



TO A FAT PIG

WHEN I peruse that tranquil countenance,
When I behold you lying in the deep,
Calm torpor of your customary trance,
And smiling in your sleep ;

When I compare the lives that men endure,
The hard hours treading on each other's heels,
With yours, an easy, drowsy sinecure,
Unbroken, save for meals ;



TO A FAT PIG

Stirred to the limits of mine injured pride
By your outrageous *otium cum dig.*,
O Hog, if I could only reach you, I'd
‘Larn ye to be a’ pig!

O Hog, O fat, insufferable Hog,
The very barn-door hen must ply a leg
Or go unvictualled; even the household dog
Has to sit up and beg.

Judged by your smug complacency, you seem
To think yourself a strangely favoured beast;
But is there not a shadow on the dream,
A spectre at the feast?

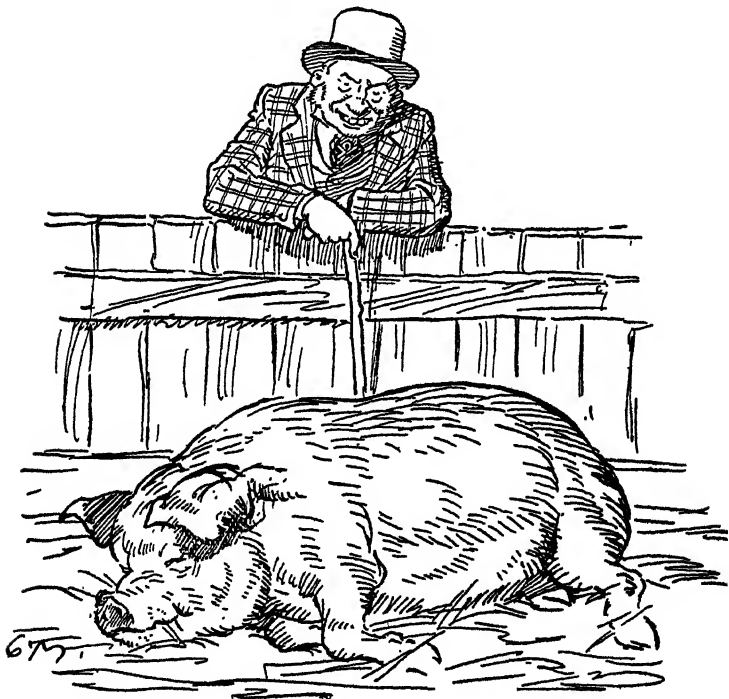
You never budge. For your voracious need
Mysterious broths are brought you from afar;
Strange washes coax you if you're off your feed—
(Not that you ever are!)

The great trough yawns beneath your very snout;
You eat, you sleep, upon the selfsame spot;
People object to see you move about—
They'd rather you did not.

TO A FAT PIG

O Hog, so unsuspecting and so fat,
Do you suppose that these attentions spring
From Man's great kindness? If you swallow that,
You'd swallow anything.

Oft have I noticed, hovering round the sty
Where you, unknowing, snore in Morpheus' arms,
A gross red man, who with an owner's eye
Approves your bulging charms.



TO A FAT PIG

Darkly he prods you with his oaken staff
Like this—I'm sorry—and remains awhile
Gloating ; and laughs a grim, carnivorous laugh,
While you sleep on, and smile.

O Hog, so fat, so green, did you awake
To the ferocious menace of those eyes,
You would sleep less, methinks, but you would take
A deal more exercise.

TO A CENTENARIAN COCKATOO

CREATURE of mystery, above whose head
More than a hundred years, I'm told, have sped,
Strange Bird, who should by every right be
dead,

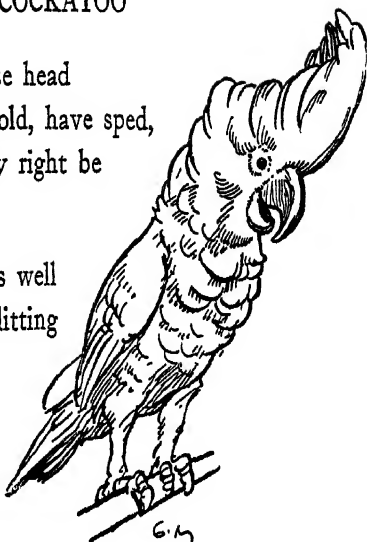
Yet seem to all appearance just as well
As when your dam, with forest-splitting
yell,
Proclaimed you issuing from your
native shell,

I wonder, when you muse upon
the lot

That's brought you to this age of heav'n knows what,
If you congratulate yourself, or not.

Great are your blessings. You can still digest
Trifles like nuts and matches with the best;
You still retain a lively interest

In the vain plumage you so much approve;
And—inwardly—I grieve to say, you move
Still in the same unalterable groove.



TO A CENTENARIAN COCKATOO

Your gift of speech does not advance
with age ;
It is not guarded, apposite, or sage ;
You have one joke, to lure
within your cage



Some kindly finger, and, with sudden beak,
Transfix that member till its owner squeak ;
As manners, this is poor ; as humour, weak.

Far from that alien country, in whose trees
Your wilding brothers had their little splees,
Here you have sojourned in superior ease.

TO A CENTENARIAN COCKATOO

You did not share with them the daily risk,
That keeps the faculties agog and brisk,
Of passing to oblivion in a whisk ;

And oft, no doubt, in this your easy state
You chuckle at the grim and tragic fate
That must have caught those others, soon or late.

Yet these your kin, however rough their lives,
Had active times and multitudinous wives ;
While you, the sole relation that survives—

It never has been yours in Spring to screech
A mad love-music, not in human speech,
But in the language love alone can teach.

The flamelike crest that you so proudly raise,
Though you have flaunted it these myriad days,
Has ne'er been lifted for a female's praise.

The plumes that you have preened and kept so neat,
You have but tended for your own conceit,
Not for the winning of some dearer sweet.

TO A CENTENARIAN COCKATOO

Musings like these may possibly have stirred
Your inmost soul—although it seems absurd,
They being suited to a younger bird.

Still, even with the old are moments when
Such feelings touch them—lightly—now and then ;
Though you, for all I know, may be a hen.



LINES ON A DEAD BICYCLE

ALTHOUGH I be a thing of waggish cheer
And philosophic habit, little prone
To make much noise, or drop the kindly tear
On any one's affairs except my own,
Yet, were I soulless as a gramophone,
Ah me, ah me,
Still would I weep, this piteous sight to see.

For, mark you, this poor stricken thing has been
The petted darling of some dainty fair;
Hers was the hand that loved to keep it clean,
Watched it and tended it, and with fond care
Gave it sweet oils, and swiftly would repair
Its slightest hurt
From piercing nail, perchance, or caking dirt.

LINES ON A DEAD BICYCLE

And oh, what joy, when, with a favouring gale,
 Lightly they skimmed the land, these happy twain
Up hill, down dale, especially down dale,
 Although quite decent hills they would attain,
 Unless the lady, finding it a strain,
 Began to puff,
And got off, feeling that she'd had enough.

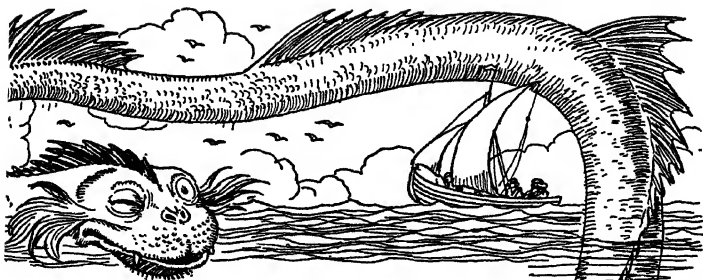
A gallant time, but all too quickly changed
 And sadly. It was ever woman's whim
To leave the thing she loves and grow estranged.
 Perhaps she found the early gloss grow dim,
 Or, haply, yearned towards some newer 'jim'
 Which this poor steed
Lacked, and till then had never known the need.

All this we know not. Only we expect
 The lady grew indifferent, ceased to tend
Her charge, for with indifference comes neglect.
 The care became a nuisance, and the friend
 An ever-growing bore; and, in the end,
 The lady got
Rid of it somehow—how, it matters not.

LINES ON A DEAD BICYCLE

And now 'tis dead. Its end was swift and kind,
More kind than life. With wild and frenzied leap
A mad 'bus sprang upon it from behind
And knocked it endways to its last long sleep.
And now, about a crushed and mangled heap
The hushed crowds throng
While sad policemen bid them pass along.

Pass to thy rest, poor bike! Thy task is done.
Alone thou aged'st and alone hast died.
Thy rider saw the peril—wretched one!—
Thought not of saving thee, but to one side
Leapt with a squeal whereat calm taxis shied.
She's in a swoon
Just now, but she'll be sorry for it soon.



TO THE SEA-SERPENT

STRANGE denizen of those unbottomed
deeps

Whence, having vanished for I know
not how long,

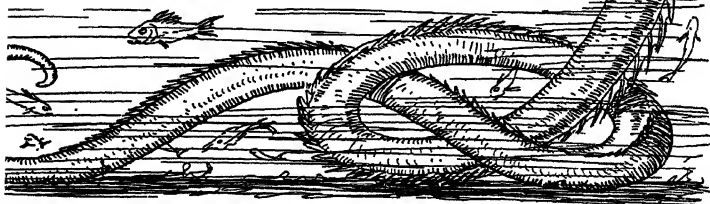
You come to ease our minds, and
give the creeps

To some astonished mariners at
Aolong,—

Welcome, thrice welcome! 'Tis a
weary time

Since last you came, and saw, and
sank rejected,

Dourly to welter in obscurest slime,
Where man was not, and you would
be respected.



TO THE SEA-SERPENT

Year after year, with constant ill-
success,

You were benevolently spurred to
soften

Th' autumnal rigours of the Daily
Press,

And were denied—and mocked at
—just as often !



Skippers would log you, giving times
and dates,

Fo'c'sle and quarter-deck combine in witness ;

While picturesquely gifted bo'sun's mates

Described your charms with more than naval fitness ;

· But the Great Lubber—bitter shame be his !—

Blind to the claims of evidence and reason,

Spoke scoffingly of Giant Gooseberries,

And kindred figments of the Silly Season ;

So you retired to Ocean's oozy floor

To soothe your hundred feet of outraged vanity,

Nor rose, awhile, to shed the light of your—

May I say—countenance, upon humanity.

TO THE SEA-SERPENT

But now, how sweetly rings the old, old tale !

Men saw a mystic object—diverse fancies
Leaned to a rock, a turtle, or a whale,—
When lo ! before their horror-stricken glances

Coil upon coil unwound ; a frightful crest
Craned upwards, and behold, in girth tremendous,
In length full thirty metres, moved confest
KRAKEN, the Serpent, monstr-ingens-horrendous !

O KRAKEN, those were men of proven skill
In war's alarms, with minds attuned to slaughter,
Armed with horrific engines, which at will
Had blown you skywards from your native water.

Nobly they spared you, though I know not why ;
One would have thought that any sporting cap'en
Would go full steam ahead and have a shy,
Just for the sake of seeing what would happen.

But no such fracas marred the peaceful scene.
You dived beneath the keel, and passed to labb'ard,
And they forbore to seek the magazine,
Nor loosed the hungry cutlass from the scabbard.

TO THE SEA-SERPENT

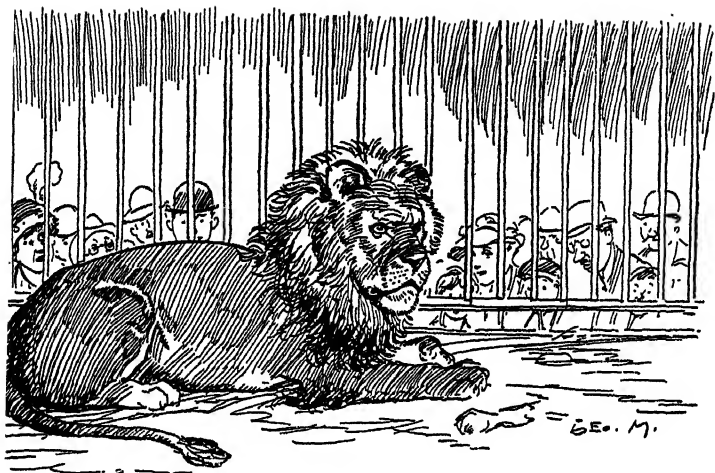
One cannot wholly blame them for the fact ;
No doubt, if one were placed in their position,
One would have done the same ; they may have lacked
Leave to expend their service ammunition ;

Maybe their spirit thirsted for the shot
Which more prudential counsel deprecated,
Fearing that, if they missed a vital spot,
You might have actively retaliated.

And, though we feel a *soupeçon* of regret,
The chronicle remains—the world has read it ;
And you, great KRAKEN, though uncaptured yet,
Are, partially at least, restored to credit,—

Not wholly ; but one never knows one's luck ;
And we may hope, with confident reliance,
That you will soon be comfortably stuck
Or 'potted,' in the sacred cause of Science.

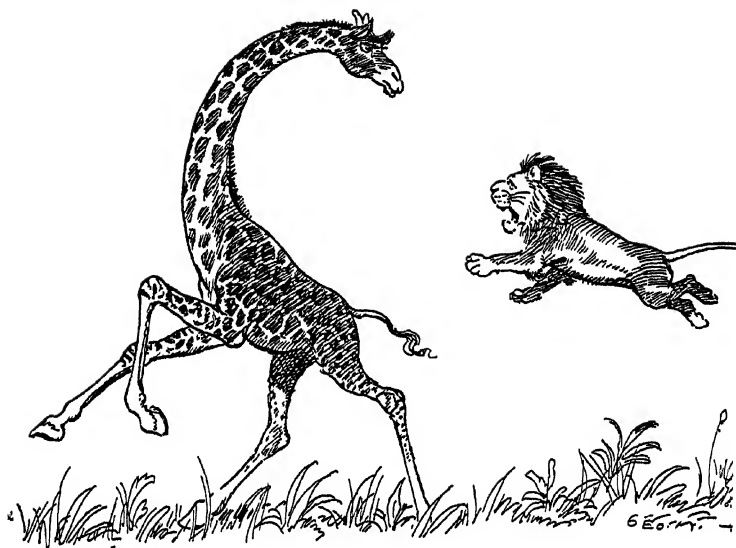




TO A CAGED LION

THOU whom the craft of evil men
Has prisoned in a narrow den,
 The brutes' dishevelled lord,
Who sitt'st, in thine imperial woe,
So royally morose, and so
 Majestically bored,

Why grieveest thou? Dost dream, perchance,
Of derring-do or fond romance,
 Back in the golden days
When thou didst truculently win
LEONA of the tawny skin,
 And agitating gaze?



Ay, those were times ! Hilarious fights,
Wild sport, and pastoral delights—

A life without a care
Save, ever and anon, to quaff
The brook, or crunch the high giraffe
That formed thy staple fare.

Dost thou recall thy shattered reign ?
The grandeur of the broad domain
Whose peoples groaned beneath
One that upheld the jungle's law
With stern, inexorable paw,
Accompanied by teeth ?

TO A CAGED LION

But man appeared ; and, big with doom,
Came sneaking darkly through the gloom,
 And took thee in a lure ;
What of the grim LEONA now ?
Bagged, I expect. And what art thou ?
 A shilling Cynosure.

Thou dinest on the dismal horse ;
Is it not tough ? is it not coarse ?
 While daily, round thy cage,
Children, whose fatted charms confess
Their lamentable toothsomeness,
 Awake thy hungry rage.

And better 'twere that thou hadst died ;
Better that men had stripped thy hide
 And made thereof a mat ;
For, most unkindest cut of all,
They mock thee in thine utter fall
 By calling thee a cat.

TO AN ELEPHANT

ON HIS TONIC QUALITIES

(Written in India.)

SOLACE of mine hours of anguish,
Peace-imparting View, when I,
Sick of Hindo-Sturm-und-Drang,
wish

I could lay me down and die,
Very present help in trouble,
Never-failing anodyne
For the blows that knock us double,
Here's towards thee, Hathi
mine!

As, 'tis said, the dolorous Jack Tar
Turns to view the watery Vast,
When he mourns his frail charàc-tar,
Or deplores his jagged Past,
Climbs a cliff, and breathes his sighs on
That appalling breast until,
Borne from off the far horizon,
Voices whisper, 'Cheer up, Bill!'



TO AN ELEPHANT

So when evil chance or dark as-
persions crush the bosom's lord,
When discomfort rends the car-cass,
When we're sorry, sick, or bored,

When the year is at its hottest,
And our life with sorrow crowned,
Gazing thee-wards, where thou blottest
Out the landscape, pulls us round,

Gives us peace, some nameless modi-
cum of cheer to mind and eye :
Something that can soothe a body
Like a blessed lullaby.

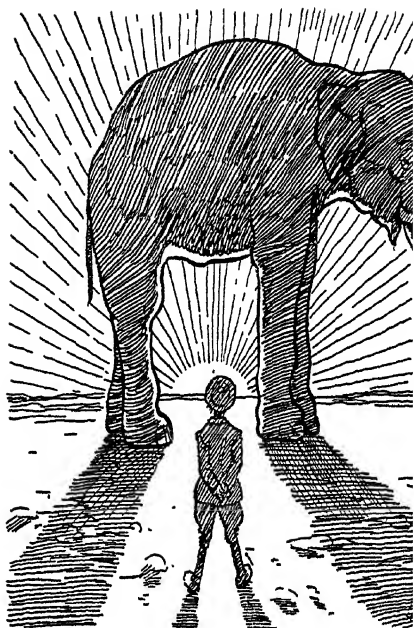
Sweet it is to watch thee, Hathi,
Through the stertorous afternoons,
Wond'ring why so stout a party
Wears such baggy pantaloons :

Sweet, again, to steal a-nigh and
See thee, ere thy meals begin,
Deftly weigh th' unleavened viand,
Lest thou be deceived therein :

Sweet to mark thee
gravely dining :
Grand, when day
has nearly gone,
'Tis to view yon Orb
declining

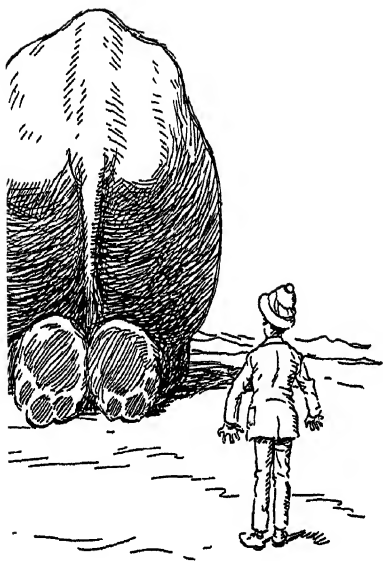
Down behind thee,
broadside on :
Ay! and when thy
vassals tub thee,
And thou writhest
'neath the brick
Wherewithal they take
and scrub thee,

'Twere a sight to heal the sick !
Not a pose but serves to ward off
Pangs that had of yore prevailed ;
E'en the stab of being scored off
Owns the charm, old Double-Tailed !
But, O Thou that giv'st the flabby
Strength, and stingo'st up the weak :—
Restful as a grand old Abbey—
Bracing as a Mountain Peak :—



TO AN ELEPHANT

All the bonds of Age were slackened,
And my years were out of sight,
When I burst upon thy back end
As thou kneeled'st yesternight !



Head and frame were hidden.
Only
Loomed a black colossal
Seat,
Taut, magnificent, and lonely,
O'er a pair of suppliant feet.

To th' astounded mind conveying
Dreams from which my
manhood shrank,
Of a very fat man praying,
Whom a boy would love
to spank.

And I felt my fingers twitching
And my sinews turned to wire,
And my palm was itching, itching,
With the old, unhallowed fire.

TO AN ELEPHANT

While the twofold voice within me
 Urged their long-forgotten feud,
One to do thee shame would win me,—
 One that whispered, ‘Don’t be rude!’

Till, by heaven! thy pleading beauty
 Drove those carnal thoughts away,
And the friend that came to scruti-
 nise was left behind to pray:—

For I shamed thee not, nor spanked thee;
 But to rearward, on the plain,
Hathi, on my knees I thanked thee
 That I felt a boy again!

A SOLDIER OF WEIGHT

IN the dim and distant ages, in the half-forgotten days,
Ere the East became the fashion and an Indian tour the
craze,
Lived a certain Major-General, renowned throughout the
State
As a soldier of distinction and considerable weight.

But though weightiness of mind is an invaluable trait,
When applied to adiposity it's all the other way;
And our hero was confronted with an ever-growing lack
Of the necessary charger and the hygienic hack.

He had bought them by the dozen, he had tried them by
the score,
But not one of them was equal to the burden that he bore;
They were conscious of the honour, they were sound in
wind and limb,
They could carry a cathedral, but they drew the line at
him.

A SOLDIER OF WEIGHT

But he stuck to it, till finally his pressing needs were filled
By the mammoth of his species, a Leviathan in build,
A superb upstanding brown, of unexceptionable bone,
And phenomenally qualified to carry twenty stone.

And the General was happy; for the noble creature showed
An unruffled acquiescence with the nature of his load;
Till without the slightest warning, that superb upstanding
brown
Thought it time to make a protest, which he did by lying
down.

They appealed to him, reproached him, gave him sugar,
cut his feed,
But in vain; for almost daily that inexorable steed,
When he heard his master coming, looked insultingly around,
And with cool deliberation laid him down upon the ground.

But they fought it out between them, till the undefeated
brute
Made a humorous obeisance at the General Salute;

A SOLDIER OF WEIGHT

Then his owner kicked him wildly in the stomach for his
pranks,
Said he'd stand the beast no longer, and returned him to
the ranks.

(An interval of about three years.)

Time has dulled our hero's anguish; time has raised our
man of weight

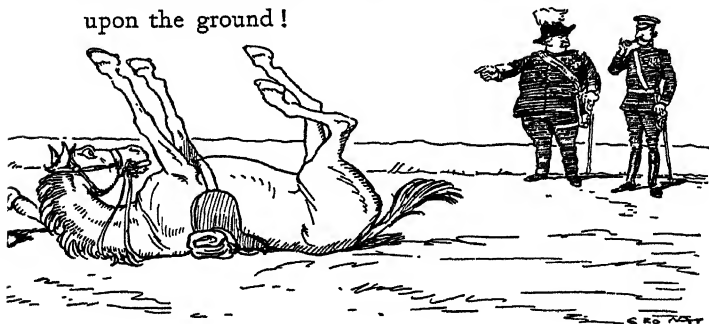
To an even higher office in the service of the State;
And we find him at his yearly tour, inspecting at his ease
A distinguished corps of cavalry, the Someone's Own D. G.'s.

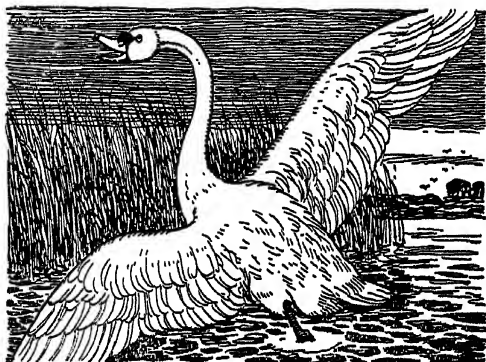
And our fat but famous man of war, accoutred to the nines,
Was engaged in making rude remarks, and going round
the lines,

When he suddenly beheld across an intervening space
A Leviathan of horseflesh, the Behemoth of his race.

'Colonel Robinson,' he shouted, with enthusiastic force,
'A remarkably fine horse, sir!' The remarkably fine
horse

Gave a reminiscent shudder, looked insultingly around,
And with cool deliberation laid him down
upon the ground!





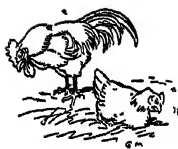
THE SWAN

[The Author believes that there is an Allegory hidden in these lines, but he is not sure.]

Down the slow current of a lazy stream
 Floated a dying swan. The heavy day,
 Passing, had left a weight of shimmering heat
 On the tired air. No other creature moved,
 Save for the light mosquito and his kind,
 Ear-fly and eye-midge. In a neighbouring mead
 The comfortable cow forbore to moo,
 And, with an air of bland benevolence,
 Matured the sidelong cud. The populous farm
 Gave forth no sound; and even the ribald ass
 Found it too hot, nor made the welkin split
 With the derisive relish of his song.



THE SWAN



Oh, even as when some mighty orchestra,
Tuned to the fray, for instant noise alert,
In flushed expectancy must still await
Their tardy Captain, whose inspiring beat
Admits them to their clamorous ensemble,
So through that still hour every living thing
Panted and paused for the delaying breeze
To cool them, and refresh their wonted psalm ;
While down that hushed aisle of potential din
Moved the proud swan in hauteur to his change.

A dying swan. He bore no signs of death.
Time had not dimmed the lustre of his plumes.
Nor dotage with presuming finger stooped
That settled air of calm complacency
So galling in his kind. One might go far
Before one found a healthier-looking bird.
But, as he came, he sang. He did not know
He sang, or he had hardly been so proud.
Here was no amorous descant of the dove
Nor music of the moon-struck nightingale,
But disconnected, harsh, and immature,
And void of melody, and muttered forth
In broken fragments of soliloquy.

THE SWAN

As when some person on a lonely road
Talks to himself, and, when accused thereof,
Says that he didn't—so it was with him :—

‘ My royal home, farewell !
For I must go,
Whither I do not know,
And cannot tell.

‘ Others have gone before,
Each of my kingly race,
Passing, was seen no more
About the place.

‘ They gave no parting word;
Without good-bye
Each went, a silent bird;
And so do I.

‘ Slowly I wander on.
E'en as my fathers passed,
I go, a soured and disappointed swan
Mute to the last.’

Thus far he sang, and, pausing, seemed to brood
Darkly upon his wrongs. And I, that found
More peevishness than pathos in the bird,
Waited, till he the silence broke again,

THE SWAN

And with a voice of growing strength renewed
His vague unbosomings. And thus he sang :—

‘King of the birds was I.

Monarch by right of all those meaner breeds
That ply a webby paddle mid the reeds,
Or dare to fly.

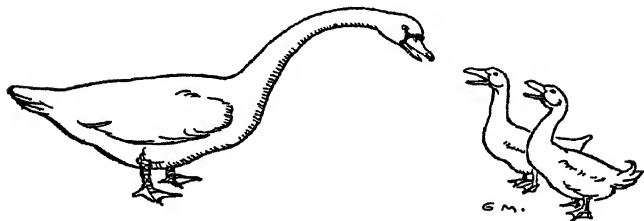
‘All other fowl beyond
In flawless majesty; by wide consent
Esteemed a necessary ornament
To any pond.

‘So radiant, and so rare,
That JOVE, when baffled in his fond address,
Assumed my form, with scandalous success
O’er the coy fair.

‘Slender of outward charm,
Yet of such force, that with one wrathful flap
Of mine imperious pinion I could snap
The human arm.

‘One thing I lacked, one thing;
To me—to me alone—the gods denied
One crowning gift: however hard I tried,
I couldn’t sing.

‘Bitter it was to hear
Offensive gander and exulting drake
With odious descant pointedly awake
River and mere.



THE SWAN

‘Bitter to brood alone,
While beasts upon the sward, and in the tree
Birds, would make music scant of melody,
And poor in tone.

‘They had no vocal art;
I, I alone, of all the natural choir,
Knew what song was, and felt a poet’s fire
Deep in my heart.

‘Yet I alone was dumb.
Only to me the gates of song were shut.
My poet soul rang high with music, but
It wouldn’t come.’

So loud his voice had grown that, when he paused,
Nursing his royal ire, methought it seemed
To make the stillness deeper than before,
Which struck upon his sense. For he looked round
As half in doubt, and then, unconscious yet,
Rose from the silence into fuller song:—

‘Now I resign my sovereignty and pride,
And seek new waters, whither none can say.
Nature is hushed to awe; on every side
Silence respects me as I pass away.
O ripe occasion for one parting lay!
O for one hour to shake my music free,
To show that I *can* sing—that were enough for me.

THE SWAN

‘All vain! All vain! And my last chance will go.

E’en at this hour, when all the listening throng
Could hardly choose but hear, I lack the flow.

Filled with the memory of my lasting wrong
In disappointed pomp I pass along.

Down the slow stream in empty wrath I float,

Song in my heart and in my bosom song:

Song rising up and bubbling to my throat,

Song that would teach them song! And not one blessed note.’

Higher and higher still his last notes pealed,

Fuller and fuller yet his music grew,

And, when he stopped, so swift a silence fell

That with craned neck he listened—‘whither came

That strange, sweet melody?’—and all at once

The sudden truth leapt on him, and he knew,

Knew that he had been singing all the time.

Then with a burst of triumph, round he turned,

And in one loud, glad cry announced his theme:—

‘Silence, each listening thing!

O tardy breeze, a little while delay!

Let every bird and brute

Be mute, be mute!

Peace, I command you! Hear me now, I say!

For I, your passing king,

Will now oblige! I am about to sing!’

THE SWAN

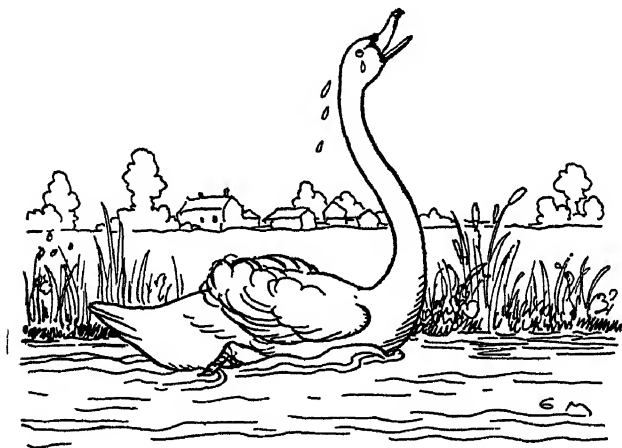


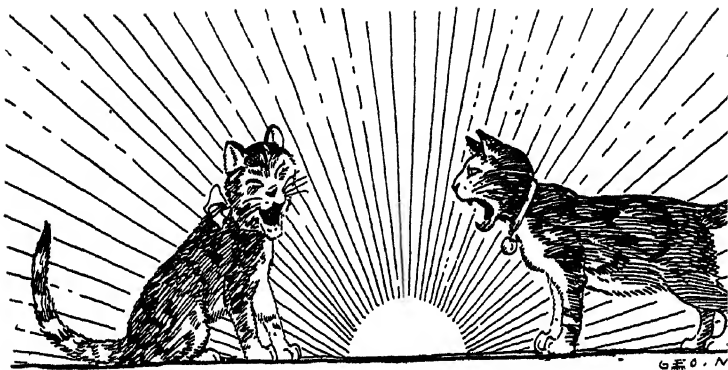
And, as he breathed, and for a moment hung,
Poised on the very ecstasy of song,
Over the meadows the breath of the evening came,
Crisping the water to ripples, and rustling the reeds,
Stirring the leaves of the hedges, and waking the woods,
And, in a flash, with vivid suddenness,
Nature gave tongue. The quickened cow replaced
Her frugal cud, and with deliberate moo
Began her vespers. From the terraced lawn
The irritating peacock shrilled May-oh ;
The garden, with the wandering guinea-fowl,
Echoed, Come back, in mockery. At the farm
Ducks quacked, hens clucked, pigs grunted, and dogs barked.
And, as defying all things to compete,
With ribald intake the stentorian ass
Shattered the welkin. These I heard. I saw
The swan, with throbbing neck and gaping bill,
Palpably singing, as a soloist,
Accompanied by some great orchestra,
Who does her best, but yelling, goes unheard,
Drowned in the frenzy of the blaring brass,
Crashing percussion, and deep-throated strings.



THE SWAN

So, 'mid the deafening tumult of all throats,
Singing, I saw him pass, infuriate ;
Singing, he gained the corner, all unheard.
And, singing, even as he swept from sight,
He turned at bay, and madly flapped his wings,
Pouring his whole soul into one great shriek,
Bitter, indignant, wild with all disgust :—
And that one note alone I heard. ‘Too late.’





THE WOOLIN' O' TUMMAS

After R. B.

TUMMAS KATT cam' roun' to woo,

Ha, ha, the woolin' o't;

Lichtly sang ta lang nicht thro',

Ha, ha, the mewin' o't;

Tabbie, winsome, tim'rous beast,

Speakit: 'Tummas, haud tha' weist!'

Girt auld Tummas 'gan inseest;

Ha, ha, the doin' o't!

Tabbie laucht, an' brawly fleired,

Ha, ha, the fleirin' o't;

Tummas,—ech! but Tummas speired,

Ha, ha, the speirin' o't;

THE WOOIN' O' TUMMAS

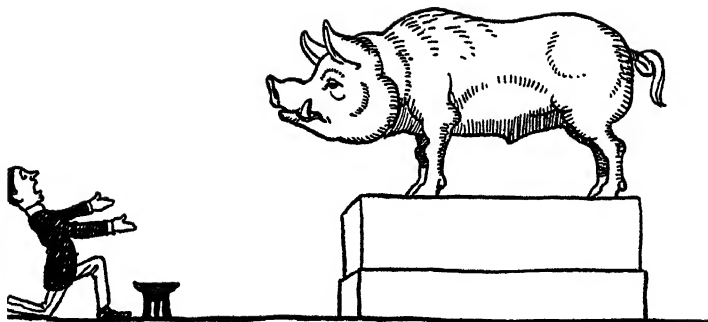
Sic an awesome, fearfu' screep,
Wakin' a' aroun' frae sleep;
Fegs, it gar'd the Gudeman weep!
Ha, ha, the hearin' o't!

Quoth the Gudeman: 'Dairm his een!'
Ha, ha, the swearin' o't;
'Muckle fasht was I yestreen,
A' thro' the bearin' o't!
Ere the sonsie moon was bricht,
Clean awa' till mornin' licht,
Mickle sleep was mine the nicht;
Ha, ha, the wearin' o't!'

'Where are noo ma booties twa?
Ha, ha, the stoppin' o't;
'Tis mysel' shall gar him fa';
Ha, ha, the coppin' o't!
'Gin a bootie, strang an' stoot,
Sneckit Tummas roun' ta snoot,
Winna Tummas gang frae oot?
Ha, ha, the droppin' o't!'

THE WOOLIN' O' TUMMAS

Swift the pawky booties came,
 Ha, ha, the flittin' o't:
Tummas scraught, an' lit for hame,
 Ha, ha, the spittin' o't;
Lauchit Tabbs to see him fa';
Leapit frae ta gairden wa';
Quoth the Gudeman: 'Dairm it a'!
 What price the hittin' o't?'



ODE

TO THE 'WHOLE HOG'

('Go the whole hog'—to. To do a thing thoroughly or completely, to commit oneself to anything unreservedly.—*Dictionary*.)

EMBLEM of thoroughness, perfected Whole,
King Hog, in whom all excellences meet
To sovereign Oneness, absolute, complete :
Supreme ideal of the strong man's goal,
Whose glomerate bulk defies
Th' inglorious arts of barren compromise :
Star of ambition, Crown of toil, to thee
I, with all possible respect, in homage bend the knee.

Thou art no common hog, who, being slain,
Is straightly hewn to separable parts,
Whereof men chaffer in the public marts,
And, at their pleasure, cut and come again ;

TO THE 'WHOLE HOG'

Of thee shall no man choose
 His favoured portion and the rest refuse;
 He that would 'go' thee piecemeal courts
 a fall,
 For Whole thou art, and must be swallowed
 Whole, or not at all.

Thy shrine is girdled by a vantage fence
 Whereon men sit, and watch thee from
 afar,
 Craving but craven, all agog to mar,
 In some degree, thy corporate opulence;
 Ravin'd, they lack the grace
 To screw their courage to the 'sticking'-place;
 'Willing to wound,' they sit 'afraid to strike,'
 From private motive some, and some from inward fears,
 belike.

For there be those that would essay
 the meal,
 But for thine utter singleness forbear;
 They have no stomach for such
 lordly fare,
 And qualms of surfeit blunt their puny
 zeal.



TO THE 'WHOLE HOG'

Westphalia's hammy Pride
Appeals to him that cares for naught beside ;
These the crisp Rasher, those the crackling Loin,
Would severally delight ; but thee, alas ! may none disjoin.

And there be many, torn this way and that,
Who of their stars entreat a favouring sign,
Or with black arts an auspice would divine
In the weird leapings of an occult cat ;
While others fear to go,
Lest they feel tardily discreet, and lo !
A strong head-gale impedes their fenceward way ;
'Inform us, then, good Hog,' say these, '*How sits the
wind to-day ?*'¹

Thus far the craven. There be other some
That would absorb thee for the very sport ;
But it would irk them. 'Life is all too short.
Why should we lose our equilibrium ?
What profit that the Hog
Has orby charms that none may catalogue ?
Have we not friends ? Let these attain the quest.
We will observe the strife, and show a tolerant interest.'

¹ Pigs are said to see the wind.

TO THE 'WHOLE HOG'

But ever and anon there rises one

True to himself, and trustful in the gods—

Who dares all consequence, and fears no odds—

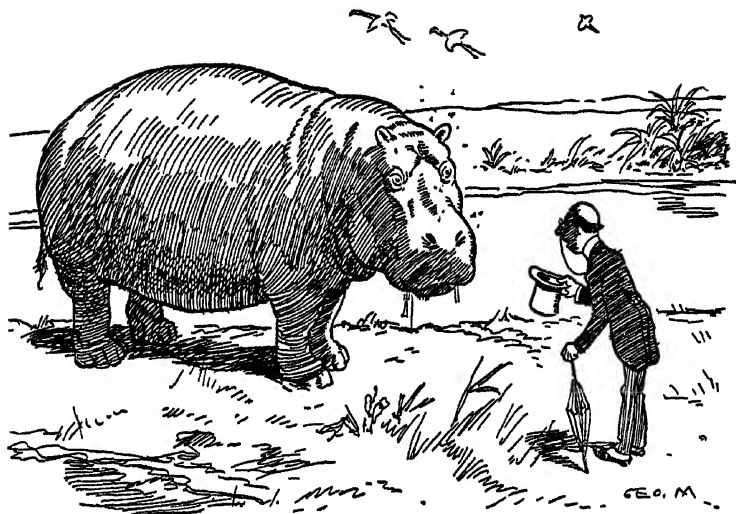
Knows what he wants, and means to have it done.

Steeled with the Right of Might,

Stung by imperative pangs of appetite,

He leaps the bar: he plunges madly on:

'I go the Whole Hog, I!'—one snap—and the Whole
Hog is gone.



TO THE HIPPOPOTAMUS

ON BEING THREATENED WITH EXTERMINATION

Woe unto thee, Destroyer !

Thy victims' cup is full.

Long have they borne thy yoke, and torn

Their garments and their wool.

Afric is roused ; the vengeful foe

Encompass thee about

To lay th' Abominable low,

And wipe the Tyrant out.

TO THE HIPPOPOTAMUS

Song of the Boatmen.

‘ As o’er the placid waters
We ply the frail canoe,
BEHEMOTH comes, with bristling gums,
And bites the barque in two.
A thousand times we suffer wrack ;
A thousand times we feel
The horror of his mounting back
Protuberant ’neath the keel.’

Song of the Husbandmen.

‘ Our fields were fat with harvest
Of rich and kindly grain,
But he has made felonious raid
And havocked through the plain ;
Our little children cry for bread,
Our wives for corn to grind ;
The scars of his disastrous tread
Are all he leaves behind.’

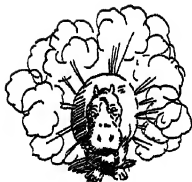
General Chorus of Insult.

‘ Does aught of outward favour
Belie his evil fame ?

TO THE HIPPOPOTAMUS

Squat limbs and short, that scarce support
His gross, unwieldy frame ;
Ferocious front, beslavered skin,
And reeking gape, afford
Fit index to the Brute within—
BEHEMOTH the Abhorred.'

Then woe to thee, Destroyer ; for the circles round thee
close ;
Ruthless and fierce, thou shalt not pierce the cordon of thy
foes.
Go seek thy reedy fastnesses—go walk the nether
mud—
Do as thou wilt to hide thy guilt, they mean to have thy
blood.
Cunning shall nowise aid thee ; every side disaster
lurks ;



Thy leathern mail shall naught avail to guard
thine inner works
For thee they bring the 'reeking tube' to per-
forate thy hide
With iron shard, and hit thee hard with things
that burst inside.

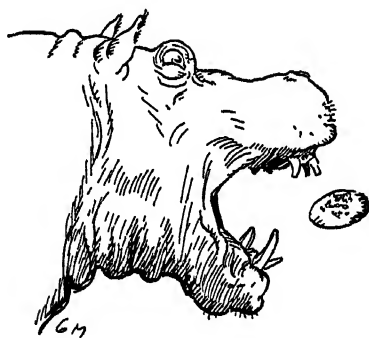
TO THE HIPPOPOTAMUS

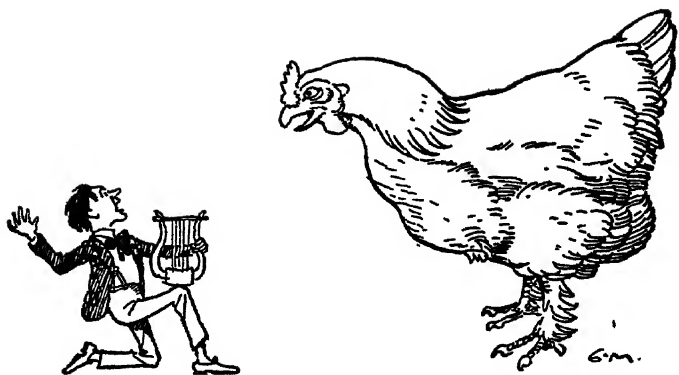
Thy ghastly spouse shall follow, and the death ye twain
shall die

With icy grip shall seize thy Hippopotamunculi !

None shall escape the massacre, save, haply, one or two

To beg the sons of men for buns, all in a shameful Zoo !





THE HEN

To-day it is not mine to sing
A lay of love, a song of Spring;
I tackle no uplifting thing
 Of arms and men;
My muse is otherwise beguiled
To gentler themes and measures mild;
I sing of nature's artless child,
 The common hen.

Little she has of lyric stuff;
Her bows, I grant, are merely bluff,
Her sternmost pile of windy fluff
 Would leave one cool;

THE HEN

Yet never since the world was planned
Was aught more lofty and more grand
Regarded as a mother—and
Such an old fool.

In laying eggs is all her joy ;
Its rapture never seems to cloy ;
She knows no worthier employ
In life than this,
So to collect a fertile batch
Still young, still fresh enough to hatch,
And thus, by sterling effort, snatch
A mother's bliss.

But, though the futile one will lay
(When she's in form) an egg per day,
She always gives the fact away
With loud acclaim
That all the novel truth may know ;
Whereby th' unsleeping human foe
Derives a tip on where to go
To get the same.

THE HEN

It does not make her senses reel,
This mystery, or dim her zeal,
Till by degrees she seems to feel
 Her broken lot ;
She roams aloof, she grows depressed ;
And then, her broody sorrow guessed,
Men lure her to a well-filled nest
 And bid her squat.

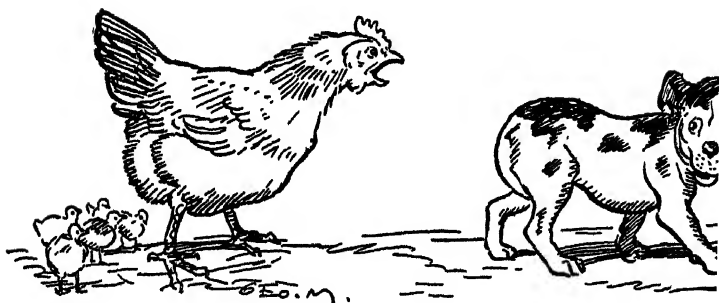
And now behold her, warm and wide,
Her rounded form well satisfied,
Though even in her highest pride
 She has no luck ;
The offspring that she tends so well
Are probably of alien shell ;
Indeed, for all that she can tell,
 They may be duck.

Yes, one may grant that on the whole
She would not thrill the poet soul ;
For, tho' she plays a decent *rôle*
 Beyond all doubt,

THE HEN

Where mental qualities are lacked
We find but little to attract ;
She does not make, in point of fact,
The heart go out.

But see her when some danger lies
O'er her young brood, and, with wild eyes,
Straight at the sudden foe she flies,
Her full soul spurred
To battle with the gnashing beak—
A roaring tiger is more meek ;
And somehow one is bound to speak
Well of the bird.



TO AN ORANG-OUTANG

O SATYR, when I saw you first
Ranging the roof with fourfold grip,
You (being, so to speak, reversed)
Betrayed no mark of cousinship.
I never liked the thought, and I
Was glad to put the matter by.

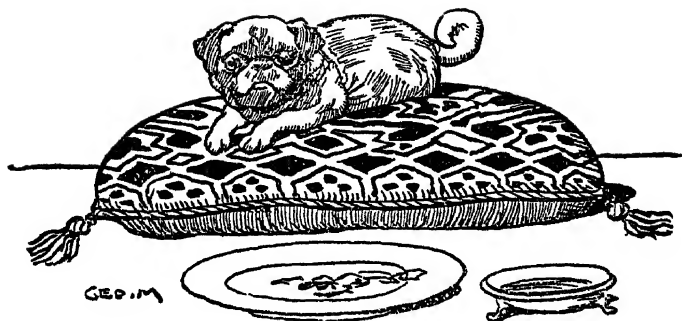
But when you stood erect of frame,
And stiffly crossed the level stones,
I could no more dispute your claim
To kinship with my old friend, JONES;
His very gait, his very build!
I'm glad I wasn't left undrilled.

And when I gained a closer view,
Your features, as I gazed thereon,
Betrayed a marked resemblance to
My more than brother, ROBINSON,
Which did imply a common race;
I'm glad I haven't got that face.

TO AN ORANG-OUTANG

But, more than all, your ginger beard,
The rusty carrots on your crown,
Gave you a ludicrously weird
Similitude to dear old BROWN;
Old BROWN and you would make a pair.
I'm glad I haven't got red hair.





FAUVETTE

(A TOY DOG.)

FAUVETTE a dainty lady is ;
Her life is hedged with luxuries,
Her room with richest tapestries.

Her garb is very fair to view ;
She has a silken coat of blue,
And one of roseate satin, too.

In this attire her days are spent
Upon a couch of pleasing scent
'Twixt sleep and taking nutriment.

For which she has a silver dish
Served with the rarer kinds of fish,
Or breast of game, if she should wish.

FAUVETTE

She comes of high and ancient line ;
Her birth, her breeding, are so fine
That she has won of medals, nine.

Such worth demands the greatest care ;
Tho' sometimes, when the day is fair,
She will go forth to breathe the air.

Not doomed to walk, as others are,
She takes a drive, not fast or far,
Well guarded in a costly car.

For this she has a coat of fur
And goggles light as gossamer,
Lest wind or dust should ravish her.

And she, from this high post, looks down
Coldly, between a sneer and frown,
On the low mongrels of the town,

Who see her on her owner's lap ;
And, stung by her derisive yap,
Would give the world to have one snap,

FAUVETTE

It may be, if some boarhound ate
The frail and shivering Fauvette,
Her mistress would be much upset.

For me, at an event so triste,
I should not worry in the least,
I do so hate the little beast.

ELEGY ON A RHINOCEROS

COME, let us weep for Begum ; he is dead.

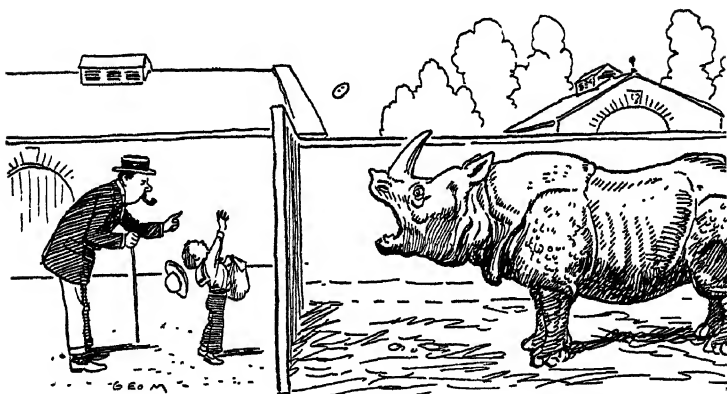
Dead ; and afar, where Thamís' waters lave
The busy marge, he lies unvisited,

Unsung ; above no cypress branches wave,
Nor tributary blossoms fringe his grave ;
Only would these poor numbers advertise
His copious charms, and mourn for his demise.

Blithesome was he and beautiful ; the Zoo

Hath nought to match with Begum. He was one
Of infinite humour ; well indeed he knew

To catch with mobile lips th' impetuous bun
Tossed him-ward by some sire-encouraged son,
Half-fearful, yet of pride fulfilled to note
The dough, swift-homing down th' exultant throat.



ELEGY ON A RHINOCEROS

Whilom he pensive stood, infoliate
Of comfortable mud, and idly stirred
His tiny caudal, disproportionate
But not ungraceful, while a wanton herd
Of revellers the mystic lens preferred ;
Whereof the focus rightly they address ;
And, Phœbus being kind, the button prest.

Then, being frolic, he, as one distraught,
Would blindly, stumbling, seek the watery verge
And sink, nor rise again. But when, untaught
In craft, the mourners raised th' untimely dirge,
Lo ! elsewhere himself would swift emerge
Incontinent, and crisp his tasselled ears ;
And, all vivacious, own the sounding cheers.

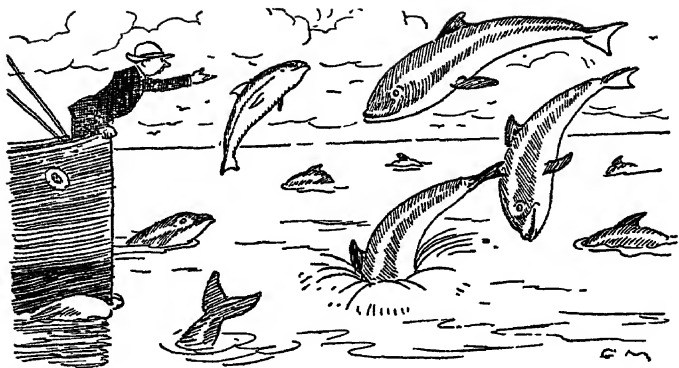


Nothing of dark suspicion nor of guile
Was limned on Begum ; his the mirthful glance,
The genial port, the comprehensive smile :—
The very sunbeams shimmering loved to dance
Within that honest, open countenance ;—
And far as eye could pierce, his roomy grin
Was pink, as 'twere Aurora dwelt therein.

ELEGY ON A RHINOCEROS

Yet he is dead ! Whether the froward cates
Some lawless lodgment found, nor coughs released :
Or if adown those hospitable gates
Drave the strong North, or shrilled the ravening East,
And, ill-requiting, slew the wretched beast,
We nothing know ; only the news is cried,
Begum is dead : we know not how he died.

Still, though the callous bards neglect to hymn
Thy praises, Begum ; though, on dross intent,
The hireling sculptor pauseth not to limn
Thy spacious visage, kindly hands are bent
E'en now to stuff thy frail integument.
Then sleep in peace, Belovèd ; blest Sultân
Of some Rhinokeraunian Devachân.



LINES TO A PORPOISE

SEEN AT THE BRIGHTON AQUARIUM

O PORPOISE, gamesome beast and wild,
You that were Liberty's true child
 (Or so it seemed),
'Tis with mixed feelings that I gaze
On one well known in other days,
 And much esteemed.

For, truly, of all ocean sights
You are the one that most delights
 The sad, bored eye
Of him whose watch, horizon-bound,
Sees but the great deep stretching round,
 And no land nigh.

LINES TO A PORPOISE

'Tis sweet to mark you sport and frisk,
Taking the maddest kind of risk
 From the sharp prow,
Yet, somehow, never cut in two ;
How you escaped I never knew,
 And don't know now.

And then to see you sprint, and skip
Light-hearted past the quivering ship
 In idle cheer,
Or to engulf some hapless meal,
I know not, but the swiftest keel
 Was nowhere near.

Yes, porpoise, you're an agile thing,
The young bird in his pride of wing,
 The cub, the pup,
The kitten, too, delight to sport ;
But, as a rule, they cut it short
 As they grow up.

But you—nor years nor weight can dim
The fire of that hilarious vim
 With which you shave

LINES TO A PORPOISE

The steely prow, and leap, and dive,
 And generally look alive,
 But never grave.

One would have bet, a thing so free
 Would find his life one sparkling spree,
 A constant game;
 Even the dour and ravening shark
 Would merely lend an added lark,
 To dodge the same.

But none, alas! may dodge the nets
 Of Fortune, when she really gets
 Up to her tricks;
 A moment's error, seen too late,
 And these grim words announce your fate—
 “Tank No. 6.”



THRENODY ON A POLAR BEAR

WHO DIED IN SUMMER OF PLEURISY AT THE LONDON
ZOOLOGICAL GARDENS

*O listen, listen, ladies gay !
No haughty feat of arms I tell ;
Soft is the note, and sad the lay
That mourns the lovely Samuel.
Let the kind tear be freely shed ;
Weep, you that loved him, weep, for he is dead !*

He came, a youngling from the rigid North,
Unkindly rapt from his protesting dam,

THRENODY ON A POLAR BEAR

To be a people's pride, and own thenceforth

The ludicrous but honoured name of *Sam*.

Twice seven years a quiet life he led ;

Weep, you that loved him, weep, for he is dead !

White was his ample fleece, and black his eye ;

And oh, his sense of humour ! 'Twas his game
To filch umbrellas from the passers-by,

And, growling dreadfully, devour the same,
While the despoiled breathed curses on his head ;
Weep, you that loved him, weep, for he is dead !

He was not made for climate such as this,

Our English summer pierced him to the bone,
'Give me,' he sighed, with bitter emphasis,

'The genial horrors of my native zone ;
This is the very——' thus and thus he said ;
Weep, you that loved him, weep, for he is dead !

Alas ! we knew not that he inly wanned ;

We could not look beneath that snowy pell ;
Only we saw him frolic in his pond,

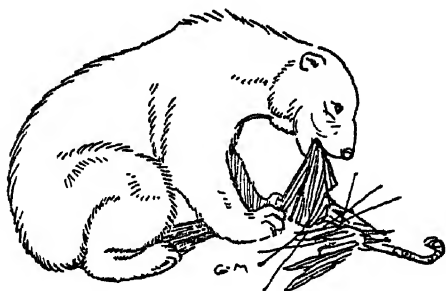
Only we thought, 'How blithe is Samuel !'
No minatory cough awoke our dread ;
Weep, you that loved him, weep, for he is dead !

THRENODY^s ON A POLAR BEAR

Yes, pleurisy has knocked him out of time.

His lungs were delicate; the wear and tear
Of long exposure to our frequent clime

Has been too many for a Polar Bear;
And Death came sweeping up with sullen tread;
Weep, you that loved him, weep, for he is dead!



IN THE CART

THE street was full. The noonday traffic swelled
Into full current down its twofold course ;
And, in the midst, I suddenly beheld
An aged and shaggy horse.

Also a cart. A thing by no means strange,
I know, no novelty to warm the heart
To an awed rapture ; but, by way of change,
He was inside the cart.

His eye was calm. In contemplative mien
He watched the hurrying throng without alarm ;
The freshness of the whole unblinkered scene
Filled him with pensive charm.

The shrilling taxi-hoot did not upset
His marble gravity. Without a pang
He saw the blundering bus's rearward threat
And did not give a hang.

So rapt his gaze, he hardly seemed to hear,
Till, when some stormy Jehu, waxing wild,
Called on his gods, he pricked a conscious ear
And, for a moment, smiled.

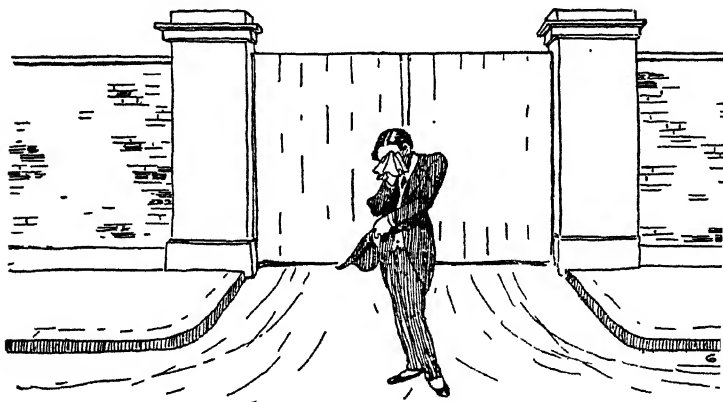
IN THE CART

But he grew grave, remembering ancient woes ;
And once again a look of bland content
Softened the rigour of his Roman nose,
As on his way he went.

One felt that in his heart he blessed his lord,
Who, having seen him well and truly strive
So long, had hit upon the apt reward
Of giving him a drive.

And I, too, being moved beyond control,
Spake out aloud to an astonished street,
'That horse's lord,' I said, 'is just the soul
That one would like to meet.'

But even as the words were on my tongue
The chariot turned—his amiable regard
Was on me—then, behind, a great gate swung ;
It was a knacker's yard.



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